

“Accepting Your Children’s Lifestyle Choices”
Sunday School Discussion Led By Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
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When our children were little, Jackie and I assumed that they would adopt our values, priorities and lifestyle. We knew that we needed to teach and model what we wanted them to learn and were willing to do so. Some years later, I realized that our assumptions were faulty and we had some adjustments to make. Following are some of the things that we learned by experience or observation.

What do you do when your adult children make lifestyle choices contrary to what you think is best? Here is what we have learned and implemented.

Understand there is a difference between accepting, condoning and supporting another person’s decisions. I accept things that I do not agree with many times. I do this because it is beyond my control to change them. At times, I may even voice my disapproval or state that I do not want my acceptance to be misunderstood as an endorsement. However, I must ultimately accept what I cannot change, even my children’s lifestyle choices.

Realize your limitations. While you can influence your adult children, you cannot control or change them and don’t need to try. They need to live their own lives.

Can you help them make wise decisions by pointing out consequences, especially dangers that you see? Sure you can, but be sure to give them the freedom to accept or reject your advice.

Should you encourage them to seek the advice and counsel of others? Absolutely and even offer suggestions for them to consider and the money to pay for it if necessary.

However, take your relationship to the adult-adult level. Do not keep it on the adult-child level. Don’t treat them like children. How you treat them when you disagree with them will determine what kind of relationship you will have with them in the future. A close friendship will develop with your adult children if they feel they can talk to you without being judged, manipulated or controlled.

Recognize that the relationship with your children is more important than the issue at hand. Words or actions that destroy your relationship do more harm than good. It is hard to influence someone from whom you are estranged. Don’t make a bad situation worse by losing your temper and saying things you later regret or giving them ultimatums. Let them know you love them even if you disagree with them because your love for them is not dependent upon them behaving a certain way.

Along this same line, don’t base the evaluation of your child upon one issue or lifestyle choice. All of us need more grace than this. See the good and lovely in your child as well as those things that are not as pleasant to focus upon. Look at the whole person when you see them, not just the part that irritates you.

Become “limit setting parents.” Clearly identify what you are and are not willing to do as their parents. Quite frankly, this is the only thing you control about their lifestyle choices, your response to them.

Ask them what they expect of you. Determine what they are seeking from you as their parents. Decide which requests you can honor. Then, draft a list of your own ground rules and boundaries. Be specific. Tell your children what you prefer they do or refrain

from doing around you. Let them know what you cannot be a part of that they are engaged in. Outline what you expect of them in your presence and especially your home. Set your limits, explain the consequences of violating them and live within these guidelines.

Don't let their choices destroy your self-esteem. Don't beat yourself over the head for choices your child makes. You were and are not the only influence in their life and at times not even the strongest.

Don't let their choices destroy your marriage. Children add a lot of stress to a marriage, especially when they make choices that are incompatible with your values. Give your mate the freedom to respond to their decisions the way that is best for him or her. Don't impose your expectations upon your mate or use your mate to bring pressure upon your children. Discuss your feelings, needs and opinions with your mate without blaming or criticizing. Encourage and support your mate. Don't belittle him or her.

Continue to be a good role model for your children. Show them by your actions what you think is important based upon the way you arrange your values and priorities and relate to others. Actions speak louder than words. Your actions will speak volumes and can even influence your children to make changes in their adult years.

Be patient with your children. Did you fulfill every expectation of your parents? Did you disappoint them with some of your lifestyle choices? Did you change some of your opinions and decisions after you experimented with some choices? Sure you did and so will they. Give them time to grow and mature as your parents gave you.

Pray for your children. You are not their only parent, remember. Talk to the Lord about the children He gave you and entrusted to your care. Share your concerns with Him and ask Him to lead, guide, persuade, influence and protect your children. Also ask Him to give you the wisdom, understanding, patience, strength and love you need, too.